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## A GRAECO-INDIAN ENGRAVED GEM

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FIGURE 1.—  
A GRAECO-  
INDIAN  
SEAL

THERE is no class of engraved gems so rarely found as are those of an Indian provenance, a rather remarkable fact when we consider how the Greek and, later, the Sassanian influence permeated northern India from the time of the successors of Alexander down to the fourth or fifth century of our own era. With both Greek and Persian the use of the signet device, cut in hard stone, was general; the need among the Indians was the same, and one would naturally assume that the custom of their northern conquerors or neighbors would have been adopted and held. Notwithstanding all this, the known Indian gem signets are so few that they are almost unique.

A description of a gem of this class (Fig. 1), which has recently come into my possession and which is quite different from any heretofore found, should be of interest.

It was procured a number of years ago, at Tabriz, in northern Persia, by Mr. Daniel Z. Noorian, an explanation of which secondary provenance will appear later. The stone is carnelian of a rather dense texture, the size, as shown in the illustration. Upon it is engraved in intaglio in sketchy, fluent style, quite different from the rather ponderous and more detailed work of the Sassanian epoch, what I believe to be a representation of the Indian goddess of fortune, Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu. She is pictured advancing, and the idea of motion is well suggested, both in the action of the figure and by the floating drapery. The latter is wrapped closely about the hips, and the breasts and abdomen are exposed, while what is evidently intended for a scarf or the loose end of her garment hangs from one arm. Altogether, the costume is as distinctly Indian in its effect as the character of the work is Hellenistic.

For a symbol, the cornucopia of the Greek Tyche is introduced in a manner thoroughly Indian and different from that shown with any occidental Tyche or Fortuna I have ever seen.

In these it has a conventional position rising behind, almost as if carried under the arm, but really quite characteristic of the classical way of presenting attributes, as not necessarily part of the picture. In this Indian gem, on the other hand, it rises in front of the figure of the goddess, the point of the horn resting against the abdomen and suggesting to my mind very strongly the symbolistic idea of fertility proceeding from the womb. Such a motive would be thoroughly oriental, and that the arrangement is not fortuitous is clear from the fact that the cornucopia, which was widely adopted from Greek into Indian symbolism, as an attribute of the Indian Tyche, has almost invariably this position on the numerous coins where we find it. Some definite idea must have been involved in this sharp change in the position of the transferred attribute.

Concerning the name of the goddess with whom the cornucopia is figured in this way and who is represented very commonly, from the second to the fourth century of our era, on the coinage of Kanerkes, Hooerkes and the Gupta princes, there has been considerable difference of opinion. The inscription that usually appears with her is  $\text{AP}\Delta\text{OX}\text{P}\text{O}$  (Ardochsho) which has been considered by some students the equivalent of Ardha-ugra (the half or consort of Siva). That  $\text{OK}\text{P}\text{O}$  stands for Siva is certain, but, as Gardner suggests, we have to explain the substitution of X for the K, as well as the fact of the cruel and relentless Parvati being represented in so benignant an aspect. Hoffman holds the deity to be the Persian Ashis, daughter of Ahuro, and goddess of fortune, but others suppose her to be Lakshmi, which seems to me much more probable and is an interpretation to which I believe this gem adds considerable weight.

In the first place, the workmanship, if not Greek, shows distinct Hellenistic influence and is quite foreign to the stiffness and heaviness that characterize the later Sassanian figures. It can hardly be dated later than the first century A.D. and may easily belong to the first century B.C. During these periods, the coinage generally shows Greek deities, rarely the native Indian ones, which during the second century A.D. took their place and which, contrary to the Greek idea, are almost always represented with a nimbus.

During the earlier epoch, it is easy to imagine a Greek gem-engraver or one taught under Greek traditions, cutting for a native customer an Indian goddess of fortune with the Tyche

attribute adapted to the native ideas, just as the Greeks engraved gems for the Persians at an earlier time. This goddess would undoubtedly be Lakshmi, and the conformity of the later coin figures to the type goes far to identify accordingly the goddess represented. The meaning of the word, Ardochsho, I must leave to the Indian and Scythic philologists, with this one more nail in the Parvati coffin.

Coming now to the later embellishments on this gem, we find the name, Rustem, in the Neshki script, and a number of crosslets introduced as if to fill the field. These features are evidently the work of another hand than that of the original engraver. While insignificant and negative from the point of view of art, they show a better and surer craftsmanship, such as characterized the later oriental signet cutters. The Greek tradition, even among the poorer workmen, looked to the spirit and conception of the work, however sketchy; the Mohammedan, while he confined himself to names and decorative embellishments, was a consummate master of detail. It is certain, too, that the octagonal shape of the gem dates from this later period, when the oriental seal engravers especially affected that form.

The time of these later additions and changes cannot be fixed closely, nor is it material. The script is our principal guide, and that might be of the tenth century or of our own time. The workmanship, however, bespeaks, probably, a source not later than the seventeenth century.

To sum it all up, then, we have here the signet of an Indian of about the beginning of the Christian era, engraved by a Greek or a Greek-taught artist, with a figure of Lakshmi, half native and half Hellenistic. Later, and at some time between, let us say, 1100 and 1700 A.D. we find the ancient gem falling into the hands of a Persian, who has had engraved on it his name, Rustem, the field filled with crosslets, and also had the shape of the stone changed to octagonal. It would be easy to speculate, on the strength of the crosslets, as to whether this Rustem may not have been one of the Nestorian Christians of whom there have always been many in Persia, but the Greek cross has been an oriental symbol from early Kassite times and the popular taste which required the filling of the field of a signet, if only with decorative embellishments, would be sufficient explanation of this feature.

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